Castlemaine Naturalist

February 2022

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Monthly newsletter of the Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.

The threatened Swift Parrot: photo by Michael Gooch
Tanya Loos at the February meeting – see page 10

End of the year Members' night and picnic

Last December, the club celebrated the end of another year of learning and sharing knowledge about our wonderful local flora and fauna, despite the challenges to meeting in person. At the **Members' night** held by zoom on Dec 10th, we were treated to presentations on a diverse range of topics. Geraldine Harris first gave us a close-up encounter with the underside of a Wolf Spider showing the spinnerets in action as it wrapped its prey in web. We then saw an interesting series of photos by Mez Woodward showing a persistent close encounter of a Planthopper and caterpillar on the stem of a Senecio. The two species were also seen on a Gnat Orchid.

Kerrie Jennings showed us two of the beautiful butterflies found locally at Baringhup, the Yellow Ochre and Green Grass-dart. Cathrine Harboe-Ree took us on a trip to Dalyenong where she and fellow orchid enthusiasts had met over two days last September under the guidance of Julie Radford to search for the rare orchids *Caladenia cretacea* (the Stuart Mill Spider Orchid) and *C. cruciformis* (the Crucifix Spider Orchid). A pleasing number of these orchids was found and Cathrine presented photographs of these and other stunning orchids seen on the visit.

We all sat enthralled by the next presentation of Grampians wildflowers through the eyes of Jackie Moore and Marli Wallace as they walked the trails. Jackie had compiled her photos into a professional movie-style presentation accompanied by sound track. We were then plunged into the darkness of night as Jenny Rolland described her search for nocturnal animals on her and Euan's bush property in Western Victoria. While spotlighting and wildlife cameras had yielded considerable success, the smaller native animals remained elusive. At last using their new tool, a thermal scope, a small point of body heat was detected in a flowering Yellow Gum, revealed by a quick photograph as a Western Pygmy Possum!

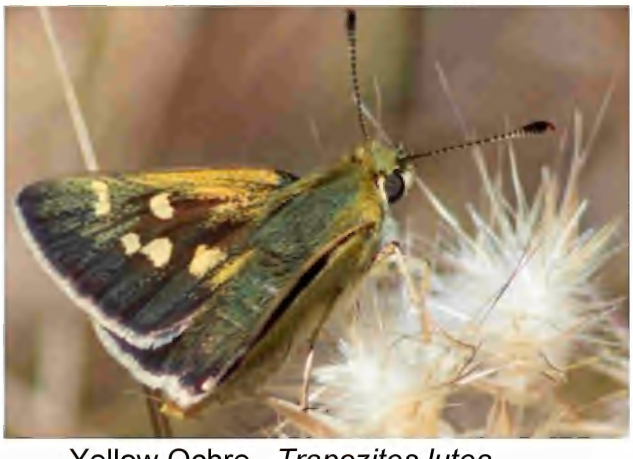
Noel Young then gave us an overview of his photographic highlights for the year, including the Powerful Owls with chicks in the Castlemaine Botanic Gardens, the White-faced Heron family on the island in Lake Joanna and a selection of birds of forest haunts. Jill Williams followed up with some exciting photos of an altercation between a Magpie and a Wedge-tailed Eagle. The Wedgie was sent packing!

Finally for a 'pièce de résistance', Geoff Harris sang his own composition of lyrics reflecting on the typical activities of the Field Nats to the tune of Leonard Cohen's "Hallelujah". The smiles on the audience said it all, well done Geoff!

Instead of the usual club excursion, we gathered in the Castlemaine Botanic Gardens the following balmy Tuesday afternoon for a **picnic** and on-site presentation by Phil Hopley on the Tree register for the gardens. He described the process behind the renumbering and retagging of the trees, following the loss of many of the original metal number labels. With this job now completed, George Broadway's excellent brochure on the "Significant Trees in the Castlemaine Botanic Gardens" has now been revised and updated with the new numbers.

Jenny Rolland

Close interaction between a Planthopper and caterpillar on a Senecio stem - Mez Woodward



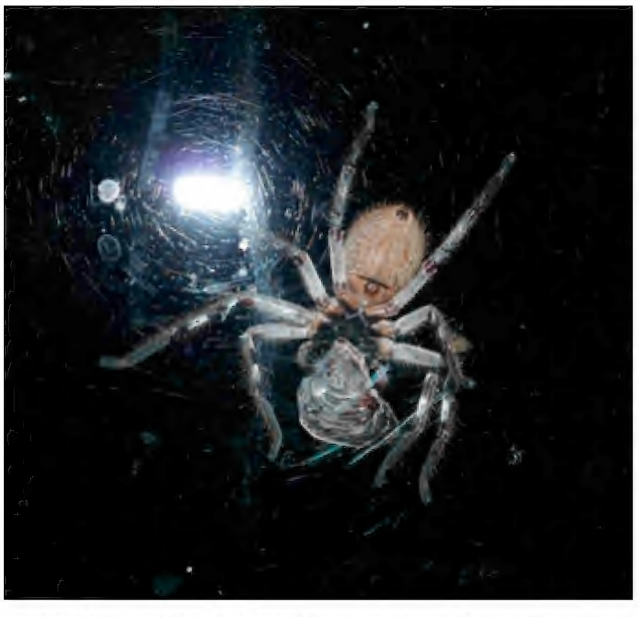
Yellow Ochre *Trapezites lutea* – Kerrie Jennings

Grampians Heath-myrtle *Thriptomene calycina* - Jackie Moore

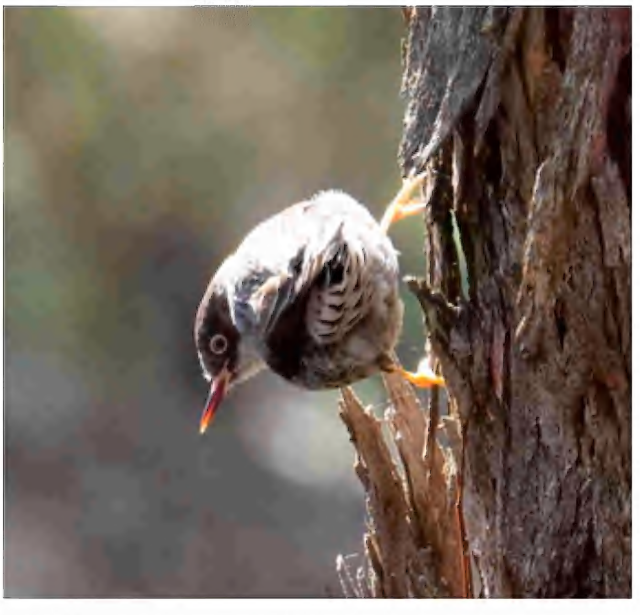
Stuart Mill Spider Orchid *Caladenia cretacea* - Cathrine Harboe-Ree

Western Pygmy Possum - Jenny Rolland

A Magpie harasses and sends off a Wedge-tailed Eagle - Jill Williams



Wolf Spider entrapping prey in its web - Geraldine Harris



A Sittella searching for grubs under the bark - Noel Young

Revised "Rare, Threatened and Endangered Plants of the Castlemaine District" brochure

Cathrine Harboe-Ree

In August the CFNC Publications Working Group revised the Rare, Threatened and Endangered Plants of the Castlemaine District list originally compiled by Ern Perkins in 2015. Since then the Castlemaine Flora Working Group has reviewed the list and suggested some changes, which have been incorporated into a new version that is now available on our website. The changes are minor, mainly clarifying where plants can be located.

'Wildlife' Observations. Jan/Feb. (1944)

George Broadway

Notes on specimens submitted to Mr Crosbie Morrison, Editor of "Wildlife" magazine and described in the January and February issues.

First however there was an article of local interest. Prior to 1933, 165 Koalas had been transferred from Phillip Island to Quail Island at the head of Westernport Bay. Since then their numbers had increased to 1000 and the Eucalypts were feeling the strain of both the Koalas and leaf-eating insects. Although the leading naturalists of the state had visited the island and insisted that the danger was imminent, the Chief Secretary refused to admit the facts. At the same time, because of the war, areas of forest on Phillip Island had been cut down to fuel the chicory kilns, chicory being a substitute for coffee which was scarce.

So the decision was made to relocate some of the koalas to other places. I was surprised to find when we went to live in Mildura that there was a colony of koalas on Loch Island, because the trees were River Red Gums.

Another site chosen was Mt Alexander where there was already a sanctuary where a dozen or so koalas were thriving after a year. In an earlier issue I described how the koalas had been introduced. The sanctuary was located on the eastern side of the mount, its location can be identified by a little loop road down a little way from the Leanganook picnic ground. The walk to the Dog Rocks passes through it. A newer sanctuary was established about 50 years ago next to the picnic ground but it seems the koalas did not like it, so it was decommissioned. On this occasion about 3 dozen koalas were released on Mt Alexander. When my family moved here in 1965 a popular outing was the Koala park where on any day several koalas were sure to be seen.

Another article in the same issue was on the subject of Cup Moths and the damage they were doing to trees as they were occurring in alarming numbers, especially in the more settled areas. Two types of predator were described, the first being parasitic wasps which devour the pupating insect in the cocoon, then drilling small holes to make an exit. It was not thought however that these would make much difference to the cup moth population. The other main predators are insectivorous birds.

However many birds will not eat the caterpillars because of the stinging hairs and in the areas most affected the bird population has been reduced by removal of habitat with the result that the cup moth problem is getting out of hand. At the time of publication in 1944 there were contrasting opinions on whether the affected trees would recover or would be killed.

There was a regular article by a lecturer at Melbourne University especially for primary teachers on the teaching of Nature Study. The January 1944 article dealt with how Nature Study should be taught in 1944. Thinking back however I do not have much recollection of Nature Study in Grade 5 in 1944.

In 1944, readers were still sending in many of the same specimens as previous years, suggesting they had not read earlier issues carefully enough. I will deal with previous specimens briefly.

Insects

Belgrave: The flying insects are presumably termites, or "white ants". The Prunus would not attract them.

Northcote: Caterpillars and pupae of the Common Imperial Blue Butterfly, *Jalmenus evagoras*. They may be common for a time, then they disappear for a long period. They feed on various acacias and spin a communal web. (They appear to be plentiful at the moment but now called the Common Hairstreak)

Coburg: The large green insect was a cicada.

Bacchus Marsh: Insect with heavily armoured front legs was a Mantis Lacewing Fly, not related to the Praying Mantis but preys on smaller insects and is a friend.

Stawell: Matted nest of one of the moth caterpillars allied to the processional caterpillars. The nests should be handled with care because they contain thousands of tiny hairs which can be extremely irritating on tender skin.

Sunshine : Little brown hairy larvae of the Carpet Beetle. The adult lives in flowers but comes inside to lay its eggs, and the larvae will feed on practically anything of animal origin, including wool.

Thornbury: Long-tailed Wasp, *Megalyra fasciipennis,* probably searching in the woodpile for a grub in which to lay her eggs.

Burwood: Short-winged beetles known as the Devil's Coach-horse, *Creophilus erythrocephalus*. A useful insect, as it scavenges animal remains.

AIF. Somewhere? Ironbark Beetle*, Zopherosis georgii.* One of the mealworm beetles whose larvae feed on vegetable matter.

Brighton: Powderpost Borer Beetle *Lictus brunneus.* Attacks only sapwood.

Botanical

Aberfeldy: The tiny plant that grows in marshy areas in the Baw-baws is the Alpine Marsh Marigold, *Caltha intraloba*. (That name has since been changed, it is now *Psychrophila intraloba*; see photo)

Psychrophila intraloba Falls Ck – GB

Lake Charm: Your plant was Berrigan, *Eremophila longifolia*, Native to all Australian states except Tasmania.

Stawell and Gymbowen: Plant specimens included: Twiggy Daisy-bush, Blue Dampiera, Silky Tea-tree, Common Fringe-myrtle, Spotted Sun Orchid, Purple Eyebright.

Fawkner: Not leaf galls but peach leaf curl. Any spraying after the buds turn pink is useless as the fungus will by then have penetrated the leaf tissue and be out of reach of the spray.

General

South Yarra: A small scorpion, too small to be dangerous but capable of inflicting a painful sting.

Hesket: Another small scorpion

Beaconsfield: A spider but completely harmless. A Huntsman spider *Isopeda*

Toorak: *Scutigera,* or house centipede. Not dangerous but feeds on silverfish, moth larvae, etc. To be encouraged.

Brunswick: Melbourne Trapdoor Spider. *Aname butleri..* May give a sharp nip but is not dangerous.

Kew: Two things may both happen. The fish may eat the frog spawn and newly hatched tadpoles, and a large frog may well eat the fish spawn.

Elsternwick: Red back or Jockey spider, *Latrodectus hasseltii*. Under the cover of the water meter would be a typical place.

Caulfield; Another Red-back.

Powelltown: Gordius or Horse-hair Worm. A primitive long thin worm which lives in fresh water.

Mt Evelyn: Nest of the White-throated Warbler, *Gerygone olivacea,* aka Bush Canary, White-throated Flyeater. The little verandah over the entrance is a feature of Gerygone nests.

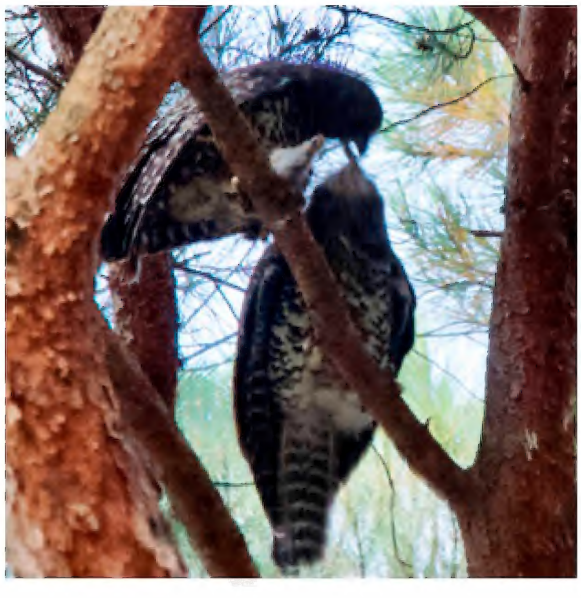
The CBG Powerful Owls

Peter Turner

As Noel Young reported in the September 2021 edition of *Castlemaine Naturalist*, the first of last year's brood of Powerful Owl chicks (owlets) was seen early in August, and then on 15th August a second owlet joined its sibling. For the next few months, the chicks and one or both parents roosted in the cypress trees along the northern section of the Botanical Gardens track – and the local possum population was steadily reduced. Bird lovers and many members of the public enjoyed the privilege of seeing these amazing birds. Sadly, at the beginning of October, one of the chicks was missing, found dead on 4th October near the railway line. The owlets had been developing their flying skills through September – but perhaps not well enough to manage the air disturbance from a passing train.

Over the past two months, the family has often roosted elsewhere, sometimes in the large Stone Pine north of the playground, at other times who knows! We saw the male [above] and owlet (with remains of a possum) [right] in the Stone Pine on 14th January.

The owlet now looks very similar to the female, with smaller, more rounded head than the male, so the consensus of the local experts is that it is female. We returned around dusk, hearing the owlet's high "chittering" call. After a while, she flew off to a nearby tree, then another. Then the female called from near the playground – we followed, and saw mother and daughter sitting close, silhouetted against the darkening sky, feeding in progress. A magical experience!



The owls were back in the Stone Pine on 20th; Rosemary, Noel and I hoped to see feeding but they all flew off (not a sound from those great wings) towards the south. Then again, on 25th, I joined two other keen observers to hear the owlet calling again and being fed by the female [left] So the young female, looking so close to being fully adult, is still dependent.

Local observations of past breeding seasons indicate that they usually all leave by end of January, with the adult pair often returning in April to start another breeding season. The young owls have to venture out to find their own territory and seek a mate once fully mature. The entry on Powerful Owls in *Handbook of the Birds of the World* states that the young owls can remain dependent up until the start of the next breeding season, so there may be more magical evenings ahead before we farewell the CBG POs until the next time they raise a family here.

Birds of Sutton Grange December 2021/January 2022

Nigel Harland

Superb Fairy-wren	Red-browed Finch	White-browed Scrubwren
Australian Magpie	Australian Raven	Laughing Kookaburra
Yellow-tufted Honeyeater	Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	Long-billed Corella
Crimson Rosella	New Holland Honeyeater	Welcome Swallow
Common Bronzewing	Red Wattlebird	Galah
Striated Pardalote	Grey Shrike-thrush	Eurasian Blackbird
Grey Currawong	White Faced Heron	Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike
Eastern Rosella	Rufous Whistler	Horsefield's Bronze-cuckoo
Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo		Brown Falcon

Dec: Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos occasionally seen flying overhead, usually picked by call.

Similarly, the Horsefield's Bronze-cuckoo is usually heard rather than seen. Vocal Rufous Whistler overstaying his welcome.

Jan: Not many birds of prey since the rabbits disappeared, so it was nice to see a Brown Falcon being harried by Magpies.

Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo not a common visitor, usually in groups, but this time just a single bird. Having said that, a group of five flew over the following day!

Observations

Cathrine Harboe-Ree

Imperial Hairstreak, Imperial blue, or Common Imperial Blue Butterfly, *Jalmenus evagoras*, a small, metallic blue butterfly of the family Lycaenidae, seen near Forest Creek. This species is notable for its unique relationship with ants of the genus *Iridomyrmex* and only lives and feeds on *Acacia* plants. The ants provide protection for juveniles and cues for adult mating behaviour. They are compensated with food secreted from the larvae.

Mez Woodward - Amethyst Hairstreak Butterflies

What a delightful start to 2022 to discover a small colony of Amethyst Hairstreak butterflies (*Jalmenus icilius*). These beautiful creatures are classified as Endangered under the 2021 Schedule of Victorian Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act and there are very few records, and even less locally, on the ALA Atlas and iNaturalist.

These butterflies are kind to the human observer, preferring small trees and saplings of their host acacia species, in this case blackwood (*Acacia melanoxylon*), thereby being nicely at eye level for all their life stages. The adults can be seen flying around their trees singly or in pairs most days. Flying males patrol continually for a mate, and you may also notice a single female (look for a fat abdomen) moving in through the leaves and walking along the branches, searching for a suitable slit to house her cluster of eggs. If you are very lucky you can watch her laying her tiny 0.6mm eggs, pushing out and carefully placing each egg before slightly adjusting her position for the next. A wonderful experience.

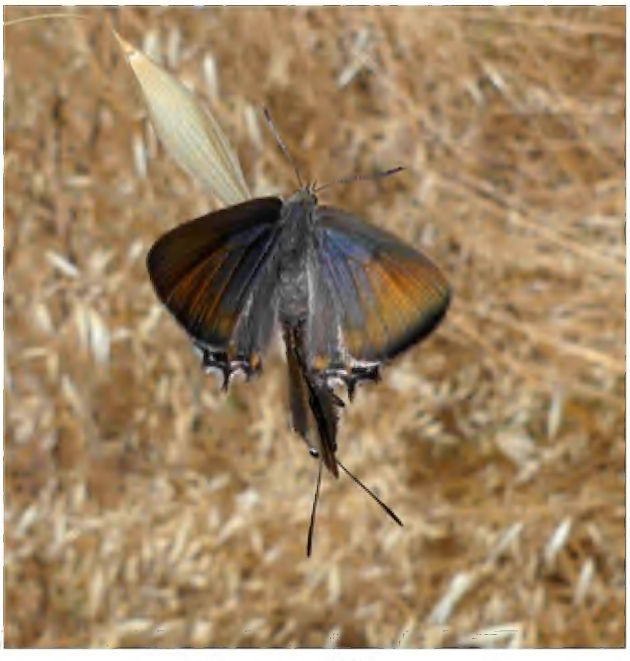
Caterpillars are initially yellow, changing through to pale greens and browns and developing stripes as they grow. They are well camouflaged against the leaves and branches, enjoying the tender young leaves seemingly at any time of day. Significantly, as with other Blues, they are almost invariably attended by ants, and the literature suggests that for Amethysts this relationship is quite specific to the tiny ants of the *Iridomyrmex rufoniger* group. Amazingly, both caterpillars and pupae actively create sounds to attract the ants. Apparently the ants harvest secretions from the caterpillars and the pupae, and take this food down to feed ant larvae in nearby underground nests. In return the busy fussing ants protect the caterpillars and pupae from predators and parasitoids. They can be quite aggressive and deliver a painful bite to the intrusive photographer.

Interestingly, in almost all cases at this colony, acacia horned treehoppers (*Sextius virescens*) are mingled with or very close to the caterpillars. There is a mutually beneficial relationship between the treehoppers and the ants, who milk honeydew from the sap-sucking treehoppers in return for protection. Any information on any direct relationship between the butterfly larvae and the treehoppers would be great to hear.

Adult *Jalmenus ictinus*

Amethyst eggs

Jalmenus icilius female



Jalmenus ictinus mating

Feral Deer in our area

The CFNC is a member the Victorian Deer Control Community Network, a community group dedicated to the control of these invasive feral species that are causing extensive damage to both natural and agricultural areas as well as being a significant road hazard. Although reported numbers are low to very low in our area we are receiving more reports of deer sightings and damage as their numbers increase.

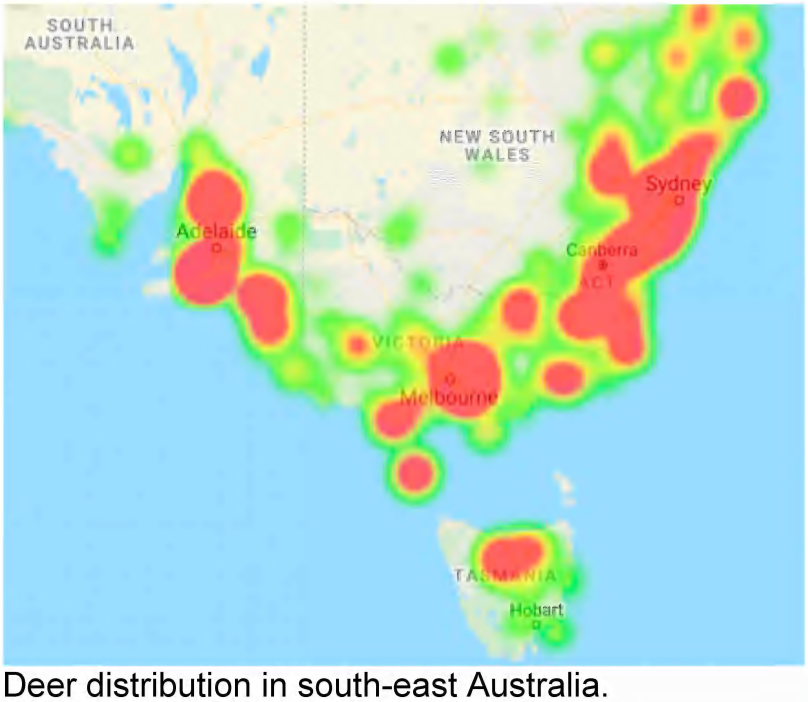
If you see deer, deer signs (hoof-prints, scats) or deer damage (bark rubbing, wallows, etc) then the best response is to report this on Deer Scan. These reports provide information that help track the number of deer across the country and prioritise control measures where necessary.

Deer Scan is part of the larger system, Feral Scan which is used to monitor invasive species across Australia. You can create a logon and load sightings at https://www.feralscan.org.au/deerscan/default.aspx or load the Feral Scan app on your Android or iPhone. Just search for Feral Scan in your app store.

Once you have Feral Scan loaded you can also log the occurrence of other feral species such as foxes, rabbits and feral pigs.

If you are unable to load your sightings to Feral Scan then please continue to report them to the CFNC committee. Please include the following details. Date, Location (GPS preferred but otherwise a description), Species (if known), Number seen, Sighting type (Deer observed, tracks/scats, heard calling), age (adult/juvenile), sex, anything else. If you have a photo please include that with your report. We will load your report into FeralScan.

- Euan Moore



Deer distribution in south-east Australia.
Green = range of deer species
Yellow through Red = population density (low to high)

COMING EVENTS

Monthly meeting: Friday 11 February, 7.30pm by Zoom (see details for joining on the back page)

Speaker: Tanya Loos, Nature writer and science communicator
"Window strike: when birds hit windows"

Window strike is a huge problem for common birds - as well as threatened species such as the Swift Parrot [cover photo] and Powerful Owl. Many of us have had the unfortunate experience of a thud or even a crash as a bird in rapid flight collides with a window at home. The good news is there are easy steps you can take to prevent this happening.

Excursion: Saturday 12 February 4pm – walk to Cockatoo Rocks and picnic, Mt Alexander

Leader: Peter Turner

Enjoy a late afternoon walk in the cooler forests of Mt Alexander, from the picnic ground out to Cockatoo Rocks for a view. The walk is along a fairly level 1 km section of the Goldfields Track out and back.

Meet: Meet at the Octopus at **3.30pm** or at the Leanganook picnic ground, Mt Alexander at **4pm**.

Bring: water and BYO chairs, drinks and food for a picnic after the walk.

The Field Trip is subject to COVID restrictions on the day and will be cancelled in extreme weather conditions or if there is a high fire risk.

Roadside Clean-ups – 2022 dates for your diary!

Four times a year the Club does a Roadside Clean-up along a section of the Pyrenees Highway west of Castlemaine from the top of McKenzie's Hill, past the Castlemaine Golf Club and the Steiner School, to Woodman's Road.

The clean-ups are on Mondays from 9am for a couple of hours and the dates for this year are: February 14, May 16, August 15 and November 14.

- Meet near Tait's Decorative Iron, Pyrenees Highway, Castlemaine at 9am
- Garbage bags and red safety vests supplied. Wear sturdy footwear and bring your own gloves and water
- Please contact Geoff Harris (mob 0418 392 183) if you can help with the clean-up.

From the Committee

Welcome to 2022! Your committee is planning another year of informative and enjoyable activities. Due to the current high numbers of COVID cases in the community and the small size of the Uniting Church Hall meeting room, we have decided that monthly General Meetings with Guest Speakers will continue online using Zoom until the situation improves. However, excursions will go ahead in accordance with the COVID regulations at the time, weather permitting. Check the February events details in this newsletter and our website for any updates.

Membership Fees

The Committee is recommending that membership fees are unchanged for 2022. The following motion will be put to members at the February meeting: "That membership fees for 2022 remain the same as for 2021: Single membership $35, Family $50, Pensioner/Student/Single Concession $25, Family Pensioner/ Student /Concession $30. *Moved* Geoff Harris, *Seconded* Peter Turner."

The **Annual General Meeting** will be held on Friday March 12th at 7.30 pm before the usual monthly meeting observations and talk. All positions on the committee will be open, so you are encouraged to consider joining the committee. Members with a range of skills and interests are welcome. Members considering nominating for the committee are encouraged to contact the President or one of the committee members. Nomination forms are included with this newsletter.

Working Groups

The club has several working groups for different projects. These groups offer an excellent way for members to become familiar with the club's organisation and help with activities. Groups include Publications, Photopoints, Flora guide, Vegetation surveys, Bird surveys, Herbarium specimens and Castlemaine Botanic Gardens weed removal. Please contact our President or Secretary for more information on these projects and how you can get involved.

Castlemaine Naturalist Newsletter - printed copies

The committee is considering whether to phase out printing copies of the club newsletter except for the few members who do not have good access to email, as several other clubs have done recently. Most members now opt for the emailed version of the newsletter. Feedback from members on this issue is welcome - please contact either the President or Secretary.

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club

COMING EVENTS

Monthly meetings will continue to be held on-line via ZOOM until further notice, commencing at 7.30pm. If you have registered for our previous webinar meetings you will be sent the link for registering with Zoom. If you have not joined before and wish to attend, please email Peter Turner at munrodsl@iinet.net.au

Our guest speaker will follow the usual 'observations' session when members can share recent interesting sightings with an option to show a photo or two. If you have photos for the meeting, please email JPEG file(s) to Euan Moore at calamanthus5@bigpond.com by noon on the day of the meeting.

Excursions will be held this year (subject to COVID restrictions) on the Saturday after the monthly meeting. Meet at the Octopus (opposite the motel in Duke St).

Fri Feb 11 Meeting (by Zoom) 7.30pm: Speaker – **Tanya Loos**, "Window strike: when birds hit windows".

Sat Feb 12 Excursion 4pm: Mt Alexander Leanganook picnic ground – late afternoon walk to Cockatoo Rocks with Peter Turner followed by picnic (BYO drinks and food). Meet at the Octopus at **3.30pm** or at the picnic ground at **4pm**.

Please bring a valid paper or electronic COVID vaccination certificate or medical exemption to show us at check in.

Mon Feb 14 Roadside clean-up: see details on page 11

Fri Mar 11 Meeting: Annual General Meeting.
Speakers – Geraldine and Geoff Harris

Club website (Web master: Ron Wescott) - http://castlemainefnc.wordpress.com/

Castlemaine Naturalist - email newsletter material to: newsletter.cfnc@gmail.com

*Deadline for the March edition is February 25.

Subscriptions for 2021
Ordinary membership: Single $35, Family $50
Pensioner or student: Single $25, Family $30
Subscription includes postage of the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist

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